

Community Conversations

For Residents Most Experienced in Life

TEN TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL ACTIVITIES

1. Get to know the adults in your group

- Spend time learning their names, interests, and background; keep notes. Share information about yourself, too.
- Introduce yourselves at every program and wear nametags with large print.
- Try using ice-breakers to introduce yourselves and your topics.
- Seek out their opinions and suggestions for group activities.
- Help them to take ownership of this group and its activities.

2. Be well prepared for your activities

- Outline each step of your activities including introductions/icebreakers, resources to use, possible discussion questions, photos/music/things to touch...
- View any audiovisuals in advance and practice reading stories out loud.
- Include extra materials in case your original plans change.
- Call the Activity Directors or group leaders ahead of time to remind them of your activity and any special needs you might have for that day.

3. Make sure your space works well for your activities

- Keep groups to 8 to 10 persons to help ensure that you have a good discussion.
- Make sure the room is comfortable and allows everyone to see and HEAR each other. Sitting around a table often works best.
- Try to avoid noisy spots and confined areas that are difficult for wheelchair and walker users. A separate room with a door to close is best.

4. Make adjustments for people with hearing and vision losses

- Put any handouts in large print (16 – 18 pt. in Arial or a similar clean font).
- Find out which persons have a hearing loss and make sure they are sitting in the best spot for them to hear and participate. (Ask them where they should sit to hear best.)
- Consider using an assistive listening system or a microphone/sound system.
- Learn to project your voice for easier listening (your on-stage voice).

5. Develop ground rules for group activities

- Ask the group to develop some simple ground rules that make everyone feel comfortable.
- Consider rules that promote discussion, value confidentiality, and respect different opinions.
- If necessary, remind them of their rules at each session.

6. Focus on developing your facilitation skills

- Make listening a priority. People need to know they are heard and their opinions are valued.
- Ask open-ended questions that provoke thoughtful, personal replies.
- Give people time to answer; remember the eight second rule. (A little silence is ok.)
- Start the discussion by sharing your own experience. That often will help get the conversation started.

7. Discover materials that your group will enjoy

- Read more short stories, poetry, essays, memoirs, and non-fiction that are short and discussable. Some juvenile and teen materials work well, too.
- Avoid happy endings and look for works that generate some controversy or have ambiguous endings.
- Seek suggestions from your friends who read broadly.
- Give participants large print copies of some of the materials you use. They can read aloud or follow your reading.

8. Explore different types of activities

- Keep your group looking forward to the next activity. Mix it up and find the kinds of activities that engage people.
- Remember that thoughtful discussion is the goal, not passive entertainment.
- Make this a multi-sensory experience. Use props, music, photos, smells, tastes...
- Some of the best props are your own photos and objects that relate to the theme.

9. Get to know the Activity Coordinators and Group Leaders

- Ask them for help in identifying people for your group, in setting up rooms and AV equipment, for ideas for possible discussions, etc.
- Share any problems you are facing: room arrangements, participants who aren't ready for your group, inappropriate behaviors, too large a group...
- Keep them informed of your plans and ask their advice.

10. Share information with other project facilitators and help each other out

- Seek advice from others – on possible resources to use, activities to try, etc.
- Share your successes with other facilitators. They may be able to use a similar topic/approach.
- Use the project's PBworks site (leecolibrary.pbworks.com) and email to stay in touch. Project outlines and stories are available here, too.